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## ARTICLE

### **The role of comprehensive schools in supporting the well-being of Northern-Finnish young people as perceived by the young people, parents and carers**

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## The role of comprehensive schools in supporting the well-being of Northern-Finnish young people as perceived by the young people, parents and carers

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### Abstract

In Finland, services aimed at supporting the well-being of young people and their families are fragmented. This research explores the expectations of young people and parents and carers concerning the well-being of young people and their perceptions of the school's role in supporting young people. The research was conducted in the form of a survey addressed to ninth-graders (N=440) and parents and carers (N=289) in Finnish Lapland in 2018. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were performed on the data. The results show that most students from families with unsupportive family atmosphere and parenting did not wish to seek help. Still, among the whole study population, most of the young people experienced school as a natural place to receive extensive support for well-being. Both students and parents and carers wanted school to be a low-threshold place with various professionals who see, hear and support the students as needed. However, the challenge is to develop services that help struggling families. It would be necessary to invest in the development of collaborative, multi-agent school cultures that nurture students' initiative and engagement. We call this approach *sustainable well-being* which means working continuously to build trust and support for young people every day.

Keywords: sustainable well-being, young people, parents and carers, comprehensive school, preventive student welfare work

## Introduction

In Finland, social welfare and health care legislation is currently being reformed. Finland aims to organise services as part of a new kind of regional government. At this time, researchers, authorities and professionals have excellent opportunities to influence the content and principles of child, youth and family services. The idea of early intervention has dominated Finnish child and youth services for the past three decades, but the services remain fragmented, with an emphasis on corrective actions (Häkli, Korkiamäki and Kallio 2018).

We considered whether the school could adopt a new role as a meeting arena for young people and different professionals, providing a coherent structure for youth services. The school's role is generally recognised as a place for learning academic skills, but, at the same time, it is also a social community building students' identity and social skills (e.g. Skinner, Furrer, Machand and Kinderman 2008). A well-functioning school can protect children and act as a buffer between society's demands and children's well-being (e.g. Järventie 2005). The students' learning outcomes and their possibilities of participation in schooling contexts are related to their competence as agents later in their adult life (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hokka and Paloniemi 2013).

However, the school's new role as a producer of multiple youth services would require new professional strategies. To begin with, professionals related to students' welfare services lack competence and knowledge to increase client-oriented services, such as those promoting engagement and participation of young people and their families (e.g. Dadfar, Brege & Semnani 2013). Also, the teacher's role as a transmitter of knowledge has been traditionally emphasised, and the family's internal affairs have been considered to fall outside the scope of the teacher's professional role (Lakkala, Turunen, Laitinen and Kauppi 2019). The difficulties in engaging students and collaborating with families became explicit in the report by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (2014). The report indicates that students' and their families' self-assessment of their need for support was rarely considered when planning the support for learning and schooling. It seems that, in Finland, schools are unable to utilise the experience of students and their families. International research (e.g. Epstein 2013) has documented this issue, too.

Our article contributes to the discussion of young people's and families' experiences, along with their opinions on the school's role in supporting student well-being. We ask whether young people's family background influences their willingness to seek help to support their own well-being. How do young people perceive the role of the school in situations in which they need help with various issues in their lives? How do parents and carers see the school's role in supporting young people's well-being? By listening to the opinions of young people and families, our research proposes the concept of *sustainable well-being*. How can school services encourage young people to make positive far-reaching and sustainable decisions in their life? With the help of our findings, we will outline the kinds of school structures and approaches that would enhance the agency and well-being of young people and their families in a sustainable way.

## Theoretical context

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 enshrines children's and young people's rights to participate in decision-making. The right to participate is in line with UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO 2017). According to previous research, children's and young people's possibilities to participate in their community is indeed one of the determinants of human well-being. Allardt (1976) divided the dimensions of human well-being to three key components: 'having', 'loving' and 'being'. 'Having' is related to appropriate housing, sufficient income and satisfactory health. 'Loving' means loving relationships and a feeling of belonging to a community. 'Being' highlights the ability to influence one's life and to make a difference in relationships or the surrounding community. Baumrind (1966, 1991) states that a young person's optimal competence consists of agency in one's life and confidential, close relationships. Agency means the ability to live one's life in a way that fills the needs of autonomy, independence and self-determination. Meaningful relationships refer to the needs of being cared for and committed to others. We see well-being as an ongoing active process determined by the individual's abilities and possibilities to make choices in their own life, and as a valuable life with relationships built through one's own choices (White 2011).

Family and school are the two most important contexts influencing children's and young people's well-being. The qualities of family and parenting are important determinants of children's future. For example, the quality of parental emotional attachment and parental control influence children's agency, prosocial behaviour and decisions relevant to well-being (Aunola, Tolvanen, Viljaranta, Nurmi, 2013; Moretti and Peled 2004). Consequently, a young person whose parents have weak parental skills and difficulties in social interaction lacks both resources and skills to act in a prosocial way (Lantela and Rajala 2019) In fact, children and young people with a wounded self-image may accumulate their own difficulties through their own actions which are based on their social expectations (Järventie 2005).

As a place where children and young people generally spend their days, the school is a significant forum for children's and young people's social relationships and as such a significant platform for building one's identity (Reschly and Christenson 2006). A strong body of research shows that if schools are unable to identify students' problems and provide them with support and services as needed, the well-being of students decreases. For example, Rönkä and Pulkkinen (1995) used longitudinal data (N=396) of adolescents and noted that men who had problems in social functioning in young adulthood, had often experienced a history including aggressiveness at age eight and problems in school adjustment and in the family at age 14. Äärelä, Uusiautti and Määttä (2015) analysed young prisoners' narratives about their school paths. The reasons why the young people who participated in the research had become dropouts are not univocal. Nevertheless, risk factors such as poor academic outcomes (e.g. Battin-Pearson *et al.* 2000) and behavioural problems (e.g. Christenson and Thurlow 2004) can be detected. The young prisoners called for humanity, consistent rules and limits, and the sense of caring, nurturing and solidarity at school (Äärelä *et al.* 2015).

Björn, Aro, Koponen, Fuchs and Fuchs (2016) noted that teachers lack the ability to identify the early signs of problems and intervene in a constructive way. In addition, the child's views may not be heard

and the procedural nature of supporting the child may be fractured due to changing authorities (Kauppi, Laitinen, Lakkala and Turunen 2017). Furthermore, the insufficient possibilities and competence to do multi-professional team work among various authorities may prevent the support process from proceeding in a structured way (Stone and Zibulsky 2015; Lakkala *et al.* 2019).

The school reaches the whole age group, and in many cases, the school's adults have years of experience of working with young people and families. In Finnish comprehensive school, the welfare work is divided into two support systems that are expected to communicate reciprocally. The first support system is the three-tiered support for learning and schooling, and it is the right of every student (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). The general support takes place every day, the intensified support is meant for students at risk of dropping out of school or having long lasting difficulties in their studies (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). The third tier is the special support, which requires official administrative decision (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). The second support structure is the student welfare system, which consists of communal and individual student welfare work (Student Welfare Act 1287/2013). The individual welfare work consists of school health, psychologist and social work services.

Communal student welfare is a rather new concept, emphasised in the latest Finnish Student Welfare Act. The introduction of the concept has caused uncertainty among teachers and school social workers as it demands restructuring their professional expertise (Laitinen *et al.* 2018). Communal student welfare calls for supporting young people's comprehensive well-being as well as offering multi-professional help (Rose 2011). Stone and Zibulsky (2015) explored various school-based support strategies. They note that health and mental health programmes in schools increase the school's capability to connect to local services although, historically, schools have had difficulties in engaging families with other service providers that work with young people and their families. In addition, in interventions focusing on social and emotional competence, the best results have been obtained in interventions engaging the entire family in various activities, e.g. by providing both the young people and their families assignments and information on social and emotional skills (Catalano *et al.* 2002). The implementation of the three-tiered support for learning and schooling has faced difficulties. There is evidence that Finnish teachers are not familiar with all the means that can be used when supporting all the students in everyday situations as expected (Björn *et al.* 2016; Thuneberg *et al.* 2014).

In summary, the school-based strategy that could offer extensive support for young people includes identifying problems at an early stage in the environments in which their lives unfold (e.g. Stone and Zibulsky 2015). Now we will turn to our experts, the young people and parents and carers, to hear their opinions of the school's role as a supporter of young people's well-being.

## **Research aim and research questions**

This research examines the expectations and needs of young people, parents and carers concerning student well-being and their perceptions of the role of compulsory education. The study seeks to answer the following main questions:

- 1) Does a young person's family background influence his/her willingness to seek help to improve his/her well-being?
- 2) How do young people perceive the role of school in various life situations in which they need help?
- 3) How do parents and carers perceive the role of school in supporting young peoples' well-being?

## Method

To investigate these questions, a theory-based survey research method (e.g. Creswell and Creswell, 2018) was chosen. The present research was part of an extensive survey addressed to all ninth-graders, parents and carers in Finnish Lapland in 2018, as part of a national project called *Lapsi- ja perhepalveluiden muutosohjelma*, LAPE, Programme to address child and family services. LAPE aims to develop new ideas towards more comprehensive social and health care services instead of sectorised service provisions (LAPE 2018).

When planning the survey, the previous local (Sutinen, 2010), national (e.g. Hakulinen-Viitanen and Pelkonen, 2017) and international (Bentovim *et al.*, 2012; Moos and Moos, 2009) surveys and qualitative research (e.g. Baumrind, 1966; 1991) were utilised. The focus was on local and international issues related to young people's engagement and well-being. Before launching the survey, the instrument was tested by five test users who were recruited through one of the local youth councils and through the researchers' personal networks. The test users gave feedback for the researchers and the survey was further developed.

The young people completed the survey during school hours, using a web-based form. The survey was open for one month. Except for one municipality, at least one school from all Lappish municipalities participated in the survey. The respondents comprised 440 ninth-graders, of whom 45,2% were girls, 37,4% were boys, and 17,3% answered 'other' or declined to express their gender. The Finnish ninth-graders are 15 to 16 years old, on the last grade of Finnish compulsory education. Compared to all ninth-graders who graduated (N=1808) in Finnish Lapland (Official Statistics Finland, 2018) in 2018, 24% of ninth-graders completed the survey.

The part of the survey targeted to parents and carers was executed in co-operation with local health and social care services and schools. The parents' and carers' responses (N=289) were received from 17 municipalities. The six background variables for parents and carers were place of residence, age, gender, the number and age of children, the number of children living in the respondent's household and information about having children with special needs in the family. The parents' and carers' age varied between 22 and 65 years (M=42,25). Most of the respondents were women (91%), and 9% were men. In the respondents' households, the number of children ranged from 0 to 10. Typically, households had one (22%), two (40,4%), three (16%) or four (8%) children. Respondents in 21.6% of the families reported having children with special needs in their family. The data were gathered separately from random respondents. With this procedure we reached a larger sample of respondents than if the



respondents were from the same family. This procedure also strengthened the research ethics because the data of parents and the young people could not be combined at any stage of the research. Each respondent expressed his/her own assessment in the survey. On the other hand, the reliability of the data would be stronger if, for example, the family atmosphere assessments were based both on the young people's and their parents and carers' perspectives.

The survey covered five themes of well-being and participation. The questions for each theme were constructed in a slightly different way in order to match the young people's and parents' and carers' viewpoints about school. The different themes included items assessed with a 5-point Likert scale, multiple-response questions and open-ended questions. Altogether 54 questions were targeted to the young people and 53 to the parents and carers. For this paper data drawn from the questionnaire to the young people consists of one Likert-scale, two open-ended and five multiple-response and from the parents and carers' questionnaire two open-ended question were analysed.

In our research analysis, the family environment groups were formed by cluster analysis. The groups were formed based on parents' emotional attachment, parents' communication, family interaction and family atmosphere as evaluated by the young people themselves. The exact composite variables are explained in the beginning of the results section. The idea of k-means cluster analysis is to count Euclidean distances between observations and place to the same cluster as the observations with short distances, so that clusters are internally cohesive and externally isolated (Cormack 1971). In our research, the k-means cluster analysis was used for data simplification (Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black 1995). With k-means cluster analysis, groups in which members were alike in terms of parenting and family atmosphere and interaction were formed. All variables were measured with the same five-point Likert scale and thus there was no need to standardise the values. The analyses were done using cross-tabulation and chi-square tests to identify connections, and Cramer's V to assess the strength of the connections (Coolican, 2013). The reliability of the composite variables was assessed via Cronbach's alpha ( $>0,60$  satisfactory,  $>0,70$  good) (Hair *et al.* 1995). Reliability was found to be good in all composite variables (0,88-0,95). The statistical analyses are described in the results section. The statistical analyses were performed with IBM SPSS 24 and version 3.0.2 of R. The scree plots were generated using R, and the other analyses were conducted using SPSS.

The two open-ended questions mapped ideas about the kinds of activities through which various adults and professionals could support students' well-being, participation and comfort at school. The responses were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012). After reading through several times, the responses were split into more specific meaning units. The meaning units were placed into themes similar in meaning. Thus, the first analysis was made on a data-driven basis (Schreier, 2012). Next, the themes were evaluated with the help of concepts related to structuring the support for the young people (Schreier, 2012), introduced in the theoretical framework. The results of the qualitative content analysis are represented via themes provided with the absolute frequencies of instances that fall into each theme (Schreier, 2012). Also, some data extracts are presented as examples of the themes (Silverman, 2014).



## Results

### The connection of the family environment to a young person's willingness to seek help

#### *The composite variables of the family environment*

We formed groups for a family environment. The composite variables were formed with the mean function. The variables described (cf. Baumrind, 1966; 1991) parenting and family atmosphere and interaction, as evaluated by the young people themselves.

Parenting was measured with two composite variables, both formed by two items. Items included *Parent communication* were: the degree to which parents and carers agreed upon rules to obey and the degree to which they show interest in and understanding of their children's opinions, even when they disagree. Two items were included in *Parent emotional attachment*: the degree to which parents and carers identify their children's emotions and needs, and the degree to which they give positive feedback to their children. Three items formed the *Family atmosphere*: the degree to which the family supports the young people, the degree of the family's team spirit and the degree of contentment of the young people with their family's atmosphere. Three items formed the composite variable *Family interaction*: the degree to which the young people can share thoughts and experiences in the family, the degree to which the young people can participate in decision-making in the family, and the degree of contentment of the young people with their family's interaction. The means, standard deviations and correlations of the composite variables are illustrated in Table 1. Correlations are high, especially between the two family variables and the two parenting variables.

Items		1	2	3	4
1. Parent communication	-My parents explain why the agreed upon matters need to be followed -My parents show interest and understanding towards my opinions even when they disagree with me	-	,830	,785	,791
2. Parent emotional attachment	-My parents understand my emotions and my needs -I get positive feedback from my parents		-	,815	,833
3. Family atmosphere	- My family supports me - There is a good team spirit in my family - I am content with my family's atmosphere			-	,938
4. Family interaction	- It is possible for me to share my thoughts and experiences with my family - I can participate in decision making in my family - I am content with my family's interaction				-
Mean		3,75	3,84	4,05	3,96
Standard deviation		1,13	1,01	1,02	1,03

Table 1. Family and parenting variables. Correlations, means and standard deviations

For the family environment, four groups were formed by cluster analysis. The groups were divided based on the means of the four items (Parent communication, Parent emotional attachment, Family atmosphere and Family interaction) and named with an adjective describing the quality of parenting and family climate based on the means of the variables. The clusters were named as unsupportive ( $M=1,31-1,62$ ), moderately supportive ( $M=2,83-3,21$ ), supportive ( $M=3,79-4,25$ ) and highly supportive ( $M=4,77-4,91$ ) family environment. The four groups are shown in Figure 1. Four groups were chosen because the clusters were stabilised by size. Also, a scree plot of between-groups sum of squared errors against each cluster solution was used to confirm the solution. For cross-tabulation, the four-cluster solution was the most relevant because it highlighted differences between family environments. Figure 1 shows the means and number of cases within each family environment (cluster). Standard deviations were low on all variables and on all clusters varying between 0,21-0,6

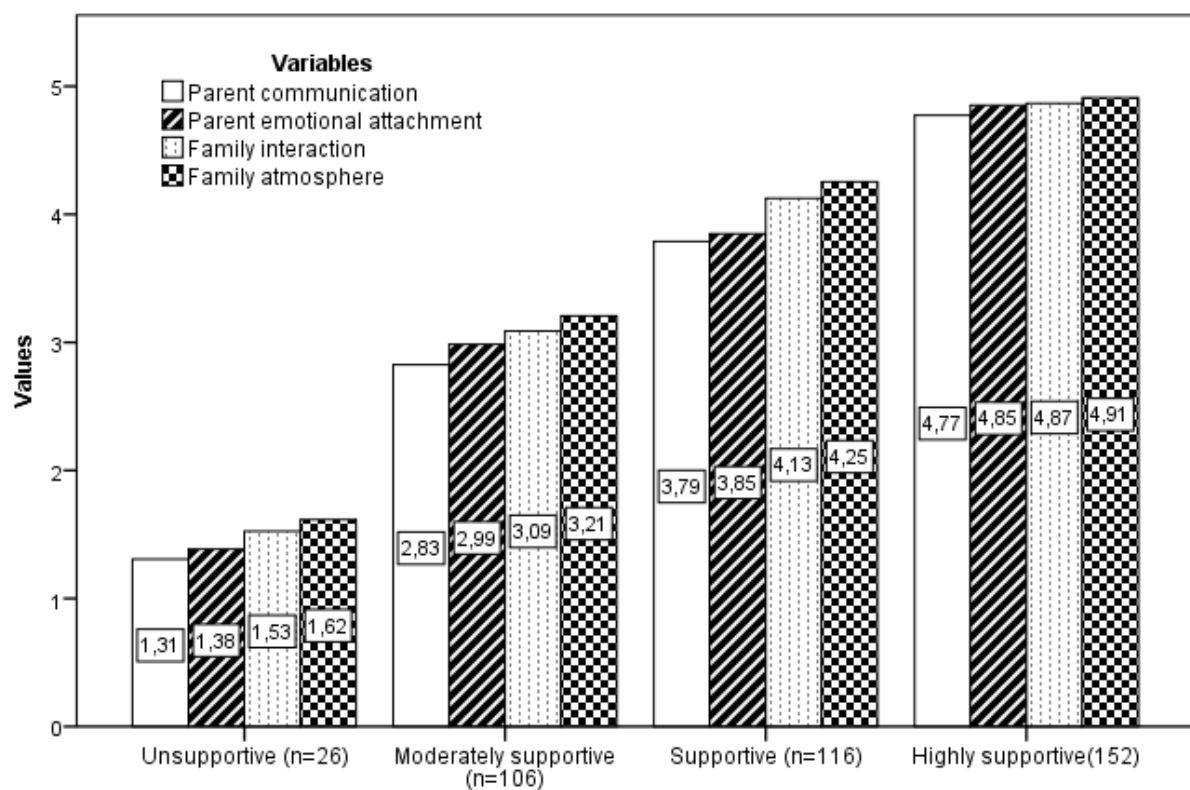


Figure 1. Family environment clusters based on family and parenting variables

### Cross-tabulation for the family environment and the willingness to seek help

The young people were presented a set of various options and they were asked which one they would turn to for help in case of five different problems. The options were *internet services*, *spiritual congregations*, *associations* (e.g. peer support, non-governmental organisation workers), *health services*, *family*, *young people and social services* and *the school's adults*. The fifth option was 'no one'. For all problems, the option the young people chose the most was *the school's adults*. The frequencies divided between different caregivers and problems are illustrated in Table 2.

	Electric services	Spiritual congregations	Associations	Health services	No one	Family, youth and child services	Adults in school
Stress in everyday life	42	42	45	67	103	142	171
Unsupportive family atmosphere and lots of fights	34	38	47	57	118	120	145
Problems with parents	33	36	46	59	101	130	140
Problems in peer relationships	30	38	34	33	116	112	131
Problems in wellbeing	27	27	45	91	61	65	99
Total	164	175	217	307	499	569	689

Table 2. The places where the young people would seek help for various reasons

Using cross-tabulation, we examined how many of the young people had chosen the option for not to seek help. In crosstabulation we used the family environment groups and the variables shown in Table 2. The percentage shows how large portion of the respondents had chosen the option of not seeking help in each group. Out of all the reasons for seeking help, the smallest percentage was in the group of highly supportive or supportive family environment. The largest percentage was in a unsupportive family environment group. All results were statistically significant. The effect size between the family environment and willingness to seek help was estimated with Cramer's V. With all options for seeking help, the effect size was found to be medium, varying between 0,22-0,33 (Coolican, 2013). According to our results, the family environment is related to the degree of young people's willingness to seek help in problematic situations. The young people who grew up in a unsupportive family environment are often reluctant to seek help for their problems.

	Highly supportive	Supportive	Moderately supportive	Unsupportive	Cramer's V	X2
Stress in every day life	17,1	16,4	36,8	69,2	,33	df=3, X2=24,144, p<0.001
Unsupportive family atmosphere and lots of fights	17,8	24,1	40,6	65,4	,29	df=3, X2=34,421, p<0,001
Problems with parents	16,4	16,4	38,7	57,7	,30	df=3, X2=35,927, p<0.001
Problems in peer relationships	19,7	23,3	41,5	53,8	,25	df=3, X2=24,144, p<0.001
Problems in wellbeing	8,6	10,5	24,5	30,8	,22	df=3, X2=18,707, p<0.001

Table 3. Percentage of the young people that would not seek help in each family environment cluster

Table 3 shows that almost 70% of the young people from unsupportive family environments might decline to seek help for everyday problems, whereas only about 16-17% of the young people from an highly supportive or supportive family environment would refuse to seek help for those problems. For problems of well-being, about 25-31% of the young people from moderately supportive or unsupportive family environments might refuse to seek help, while the corresponding percentage in the group of highly supportive and supportive family environments varies between 9-11%. Due to using a response question, some of the young people, besides having selected the option of not seeking help from anywhere, had also selected some other option. The result points towards their ambivalent – and partly negative – viewpoint towards seeking help.

### **Young people's perceptions of the school's role in supporting students' well-being**

Over half (62%; n=117) of the young people presented no ideas about the school's role in supporting students' well-being or their answers were unclear. Still, 38% (n=73) of the respondents presented ideas about developing the activities or support at school. The suggestions described the quality of school services (5 meaning units), activities at school (30) and inviting various experts to school (33). For example, the respondents wished for qualified head teachers and teachers, as well as certain kinds of attitudes towards students, as indicated in the response: *'teachers with better attitude'*. In general, the young people wanted the school to provide functional activities such as sports and games, days with certain themes and various ways to study. The young people also wanted more non-formal activities, as indicated in the responses below:

"Coffee machine and table tennis in school."

"I would expect more activities, to have more experts from those different activities."

"More activities during the breaks."

Mostly, the respondents suggested that there should be more youth workers in schools as they felt that the youth workers were natural counsellors in everyday activities: *'Youth workers always listen and help, and if someone just wants to chat, that is fine with them'*. Also, some respondents expressed wishes to receive help from school psychologists, school social workers, the police, and various sports professionals.

When the young people were asked how different professionals could work in schools to help young people at an earlier stage, most of the respondents presented no suggestions, or the answer was unclear (n=117), but 31% (n=53) of the young people suggested multi-professional practice and the school's active role (18 meaning units), low-threshold services and dissemination about the services (11), communal and preventive welfare work (9) and listening to the young people (2). The young people wished for regular conversations with all students about their well-being. In addition, confidentiality was found to be important.

"The young should be acquainted with various professionals earlier so that they could trust them."

"All students having conversations about their well-being."

"Everyone would work in the same environment, i.e. everyone would be nearby."

### **Parents' and carers' perceptions of the school's role in supporting the young people**

The answers of parents and carers (n=114) regarding how to organise collaboration between different professionals to get help for young people were multi-professional teamwork (56 meaning units), low threshold for services and catering for the young and their family (11), dissemination about services (27), resources and the availability of services (6) and organising welfare work (4).

The parents and carers considered the school to be an appropriate place for organising multiprofessional teamwork under the same roof: *'A team of professional deals with issues in the same place. The school is an easy place to enter'*. They wished for a low threshold for services. Teachers

should have the competence to identify problems and have at least the ability to contact professionals working in social welfare and health care quickly: *'Teachers spend most of the day with the young --- at least the school should have knowledge where to contact when problems occur'*.

The parents and carers found the existing professionals who support students' well-being and studies important. Active and preventive roles for school welfare personnel were suggested; for example, school psychologists and doctors could participate in regular lessons and collaborate as a team more than now. Youth workers and leisure time workers (26), and social workers in general (12) are not present daily in Finnish schools, but our study indicates that the respondents would like to have them in such a role. These wishes were related to the general emphasis of creating natural adult relationships. Also, some respondents suggested that various organisations (11) and representatives of different fields, such as arts and sports (21), join the school day.

There were 31 suggestions concerning the quality of the work that should take place at schools. The parents and carers wished for a holistic approach to their children's well-being and studies. Comprehensiveness would be realised if young people were met in different daily occasions. They wished that their young were seen and heard.

"For many young people, discussing difficult matters is easier when the space is neutral [meaning school], and if, for example, they are doing something together."

"In the future, schools could have a wellness clinic where a school social worker, nurse, doctor, psychologist and youth worker --- work as a team."

"During the breaks, it would be good to have people from child and youth work moving / playing / listening to children."

The parents and carers also suggested activities (18) that were partly related to young people's mental well-being and partly aimed to diversify and expand school activities.

"...more people at school, for example, during the breaks, watching what happens there, inventing games and plays."

"The school day could easily be longer: 8.30-15.30. After school, there could be various clubs."

"A model of mental encouragement, where a psychiatric nurse visits the school regularly."

## Discussion and conclusion

Our research contributes to the discussion of targeting fragmented services correctly and developing multi-professional children's services by listening to the actual stakeholders: the young people's, parents' and carers' valuable opinions. According to our results, young people living in an unsupportive

or moderately supportive family environment are much less willing to seek help for themselves or their family than young people who come from a supportive or highly supportive family environment. The empirical examination does not point out the reason for this connection. However, the result can be explained by previous research. For example, a family's weak atmosphere and interaction, weak emotional bond and communication between parents and young people may cause negative attitudes and poor social skills (Lantela and Rajala, 2018). As such, some young people's unwillingness to seek help is a significant message when creating school-based strategies for support. Also, as helpers for all proposed problems, the option the young people chose the most was the school's adults. These findings uphold the reason to develop the school into a natural low-threshold place for services.

The young people's, parents' and carers' ideas help us to picture how to create an environment that is capable of supporting young people at an early stage. All the respondents suggested every student to be involved in discussing their well-being. They also recommended that conversations could be combined with ordinary or pleasant activities in good time. This kind of practice would create long-lasting, confidential relationships with adults and seeking help would be easier. Partly these practices could take place during the non-formal time spent at school, which the young people in our study also mentioned. Motivational and caring non-formal activities can enhance learning outcomes, too. For example, according to Demaray & Malecki (2002), supportive school communities nourish the formation of healthy self-concepts for young people. Hattie (2009) states that when school communities enhance students' sense of belonging, they can also develop student engagement in learning (see also Skinner *et al.* 2008).

The parents and carers perceived teachers as timely identifiers of problems and thus enablers of preventive welfare work. Indeed, teachers' emotional support for their students enhances students' learning outcomes and well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2016). The respondents even suggested preventive roles for school welfare personnel, in line with the new national student welfare strategies. If the school's teachers and student welfare personnel were to adopt a more preventive approach to the problems of well-being, they would have to develop their multiprofessional collaboration (see Lakkala *et al.* 2019).

Our research points towards a need to create long-lasting pathways that build young people's positive self-image, confidential relationships and agency in collaboration with the young and their families. Based on our results, we suggest that schools could offer a space for multiple activities and services, develop non-formal functions and promote a collaborative, dialogical school culture. We call this approach *sustainable well-being*, meaning persistent work in creating confidence with, and support for, young people every day.

However, it is not possible to make direct interpretations because the respondents represent a limited sample. Although the survey was addressed to all Lappish schools, not all the schools delivered the survey to students. Furthermore, people coming from a certain kind of socioeconomic background, for example middle-class families, may be overrepresented in the sample. This should be considered when interpreting both the quantitative and the qualitative results. Internationally, the circumstances and policies of education may differ from those of Finland. Further research is needed to learn more from

the actual agents—the young people and their parents and carers—regarding important opinions and thoughts about their own well-being.

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